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THE ADJUSTMENT BETWEEN SECONDARY SCHOOL AND COLLEGE WORK IN MODERN LANGUAGES.

THE observer who compares the educational systems of continental Europe with what obtains in the United States is struck by nothing perhaps so strongly as by the fact that, while in the former there is a strongly marked dividing line between the work of the secondary schools and that of the higher institutions of learning, no such difference can be found in the American system. This is due mainly to the existence of a peculiarly American institution, the American college. The European system consists of three clearly defined grades of instruction—the primary, the secondary, and the higher or university; and it may be said, as a general statement, that no subject taught in the secondary schools is taught also, except in more advanced courses, in the universities. The United States have introduced a fourth grade, the college, which takes its place between the secondary school and the university, and the curriculum of which, when compared with the European system, is seen to partake both of secondary and university work. This fact, this lack of a dividing line between secondary school and college, would strike even the observer who confined his observations within the American field, for he would find the secondary much more strongly distinguished from the primary school than from the college.

This hybrid character of the college is becoming so widely recognized that there is no lack of those who have come to advocate the removal of this peculiar grade of instruction. What they want is practically the substitution of the European for the American system, and this they would effect by somewhat extending the secondary or high-school curriculum until it had practically absorbed the first two years, freshman and sophomore, of the college, while the third and fourth, junior and senior, became part of the university.

We have no hesitation in rejecting such a solution of a diffi-

cult problem as a remedy worse than the disease. The American college represents something more than a mere grade of instruction; it is a social institution the disappearance of which would soon result in a lowering of the intellectual standard of the whole community. The universities themselves would be among the first to suffer, for who can say how much they owe to the spirit of loyal devotion that binds the college graduate to his *alma mater*? A transfer of this spirit from the college to the university is hardly possible, or even desirable. All the elements which make up the sturdy and exhilarating college life, and which are in their place there, would be detrimental to the higher student, who ought to confine his attention to the mastering of the subjects that he has chosen for his special line of work. The solution, therefore, lies not in the destruction of an institution which has done so much already for the broad human society of which it is a part, but in a better adjustment of its relations with the other parts of the educational system of the country.

I do not intend here to deal with the whole of this important subject. In the course of studies of most of the high schools and academies we find courses in physics, in chemistry, in Latin, in Greek, which are duplicated in nearly every college. With these this paper has nothing to do. But when we come to the modern languages the problem presents some special features which seem to me worth considering. My remarks will deal solely with French, with the teaching of which I have been concerned for over a quarter of a century; but by their general nature they will be seen to apply as well to German as to French.

Elementary courses in French and German are found in most of the high schools and academies. They are found also in practically all colleges. The same is beginning to be true also of Spanish. The questions to be examined are: First, is it wise to have such courses in both kinds of institutions? Second, if not, where ought they to be retained and where dropped? Third, if retained in the lower schools, how far ought these to proceed, and where ought the college to begin its work in modern languages?

The first question seems to me of a general nature. In other words, is it wise to have high-school courses duplicated in the college? I do not hesitate to answer the question negatively. The atmosphere of the college is entirely different from the atmosphere of the secondary school. The college loses something of its dignity in the eyes of the student when he finds there courses which he has been used to consider preparatory to college, and even courses lower than some he has seen and gone through during his period of secondary studies. Another consideration is that, as the college is intimately linked with the university, every instructor there, if he is not to be considered an inferior man by the body of students, ought to give some instruction of a university character, and that the teacher who has charge of sections in elementary French or German has so much of his time and strength taken by what we may call the drudgery of teaching that he loses therein the freshness of mind required for higher work. That a number of college instructors do combine the two kinds of work is no answer to this argument, for the fact only bears witness to their uncommon energy, and it is well known that only the strongest among them succeed in carrying for a long time this double burden without breaking down under the strain.

I come now to the second question. If the teaching of elementary French is to be done only in secondary school or college, where ought it to be placed? Here the arguments in favor of the secondary school seem to me both obvious and irresistible. Whatever can be taught well in the secondary school ought to be taught there. That French can be is amply demonstrated by the success achieved in a number of private and public institutions, among which I am happy to name the high schools of the city of New York. Then it must be borne in mind that the high-school pupils do not all go to college. To drop French from the high-school curriculum would therefore have the deplorable result of depriving a large number of children of their only chance of learning French. And, finally, the teaching of a foreign language ought, as far as possible, not to go without some attention paid to the acquisition of an ability to speak it,

and for this kind of acquisition the child of high-school age is in much better condition than the older college student.

The third question, relating to the adjustment of work between college and high school, may seem at first to present more difficulties, and yet attention to some principles will allow giving to it too a reasonable answer. First, the teaching done in the secondary school should be able to stand by itself. It ought to constitute for the high-school graduate who does not go to college an acquisition that will stay with him, provided he takes reasonable care not to let it slip by. Therefore the secondary school should not be satisfied to stop at what is known as the elementary requirement for admission to college. This is altogether insufficient; unless supplemented by higher work, it will in after-life leave nothing in the mind of the student. He is not yet able to read with the consciousness of accuracy the French books which are really worth reading. Not so if he has pushed as far as the Intermediate, or better still the Advanced Examination as recommended by the report of the Committee of Ten.

But, on the other hand, the high school ought not to encroach upon the province of the college. But where does this province begin? It seems to me that it begins just where the student having mastered the difficulties presented by the printed French page is ready to get into the spirit of French literature. For such preparatory work, taking into consideration the age of the pupil, four courses of three periods each would not be too much, but ought to suffice. Taking Columbia College as an example, the adoption of such a system would eliminate from the list of French courses Course A and Course 1, dealing mainly with grammar, reading, and composition. College work would begin with Course 2, "General Introduction to the Study of French Literature," which already at this time is taken by a number of well-prepared freshmen. If the secondary schools would all do their work as well as some of them do, it would be possible to conduct such a course, at least partially, in French, and thus the college department, while not losing sight of its main province, the enlargement of the mind by an appreciation of a new literature, and the fostering of the scientific spirit by an

acquaintance with the method of Romance philology, would cease to be open to the oft-expressed criticism that its work in modern languages is of no practical value to the student. After following were it only one course in French literature conducted partially at the beginning and totally at the end in French, the good student would feel satisfied that he understands at least, even if he do not readily use, spoken French.

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